

# THE MIDLAND

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## POEMS BY FOUR IOWANS

### PEACE

By EDWIN FORD PIPER

Peace is multi-colored, many-voiced:  
Of a listener in ambush;  
Of the sleeper in armed camps;  
And the passionate one  
Hearing the hangman;  
The dead face on the flooding stream;  
Lethargy of the asylum;  
The peace of home.

Peace is a polyglot din  
Of synchronous war songs,  
A Babel of hat-swung hurrahs:  
Tenor of diplomats,  
Tamboing dinnerpails,  
Flip-flop and jazz  
Of clown and flapper.

Far, far away behind shut doors  
A sound of mourning, a memory of grief.

Dreamers build up a peace of Paradise —  
As is your country so is your peace.  
With final gesture  
Solemn officials  
Sign and seal  
Romance, melodrama.

The foghorns groan, the freight trains rattle  
and toot —  
This is no moon-dappled alley in Eden.

Down the speedway  
Racing, roaring,  
Come the things —  
The makers, the masterless —  
Goggle-eyed  
Things.

The mills flare a message,  
The derricks signal,  
The great chimneys  
Write in code.

There is talk of peace  
But man loves things —  
Goggle-eye and fiery belly,  
Lightning leg —  
Racing on, roaring on.

There is prattle of peace.

## TWO POEMS

By MILDRED FOWLER FIELD

### WHAT THE WOMAN SAID

There I sat on a stone by the highway,  
Heavy with child, by the umber highway;  
Every bush trailed scarves of ocher —  
Every thorn dropped scarlet berries;  
There I sat to ease my burden,  
Warming my heart at the flame of maples —  
Warming my hands at a strand of long red  
Blood-red beads about my throat.

Over the hilltop toiled a Woman  
Ocher-shawled and umber-shadowed,  
Great, misshapen, heavy with child,  
Stopping there at my stone by the highway —  
Hair like smoke and lips like berries —  
All her body sharp with longing.

There I sat . . . she bent and pointed,  
Clutched my beads with yellow talons,  
Letting them slip and clank and glisten.

“Give me! Give me!” How she grovelled  
There in the umber dust of the highway!  
Even as I, awaiting labor.  
“Lady! Lady!” How she nursed them —  
Dead red things to her bare brown breast!

“No! No! No!” Hers the winding  
Umbur, ocher, violet highway,  
Weaving her child an endless necklace!

There I sat on a stone by the highway,  
Heavy with child, by the umber highway;  
Every bush trailed scarves of ocher —  
Every thorn dropped scarlet berries;  
There I sat to ease my burden,  
Warming my heart at the flame of maples —  
Warming my hands at a strand of long red  
Blood-red beads about my throat.

#### AT THE FLOWER SHOW

Flowers . . . and flowers . . . she stood aghast  
. . . at flowers — more than she'd ever known were  
in the world; in baskets, bowls, and piled high on  
tables; flowers, even, standing on the floor.

Splendens . . . Plumosa . . . names, they didn't matter; nor did the crowd, that shoved and jostled her from aisle to aisle . . . except somebody like the yellow girl — she seemed to float and dip . . . to sip a bud . . . like any yellow butterfly: a flower such as never grew in gardens — lacey and lavender, with little wings.

But always . . . there was the Silence — to clutch her throat with icy fingers; padded thick to beat against her ears . . . but she could see . . . folks didn't know her eyes did things as ears are meant to do.

She knew that ferns unroll, like caterpillars in the moss — that hyacinths are drowsy — begonias too — pale pink on soft gray, fuzzy stems — that freesias have a way of looking at one fragrantly.

She knew . . . although 'twas 'lowed she wa'n't right bright — knew jest 'nough ter cook fer hands ef she war bossed — that larkspurs are the blue of creeks after an April thaw: (she'd had a row of them, one place — with candytuft to hide their ugly legs — the hands had laughed at her fer plantin' posies in a sandhill. Steen, the mean-faced one, had finally ploughed them under).

A cold, sweet blue . . . how close they grew along the stalk — there in a blue bowl . . . candytuft around the edge — and loose, cream-petaled roses . . . how they swayed and bowed to her!

The crowd . . . the silly-colored crowd . . . swirled past — she didn't mind it now — the foolish way their mouths jerked open, shut or smiling — didn't mind . . .

A rippled water-blue . . . under the ice . . . always — forgotten now, her fright . . . the awkward, country hat, and cotton 'kerchief twisting in her fingers; even the Silence . . . as her mouth . . . her poor, mute mouth widened, for the moment, futilely, for words to color larkspurs.

## POEMS

By CHARLES BROWN NELSON

### RAILS

Serpents of steel,  
Crawling through valleys  
Beside low pastures,  
Cutting through hills,  
Onward and onward,  
Till the city's black stacks —  
Menacing smoke-clouds pouring from inky funnels —  
Arise in the distance.

There lie your kind,  
Row upon row,  
Stretched and tortured in the glaring sunlight,  
Ground by a million monster wheels,  
Harassed by the shrilling din  
Of a thousand roaring mills. . .

Yet you crawl,  
Seeking that goal!

### HERMIT'S PRAYER

Having so little to love,  
I loved the dawn.  
Grant that the dawn may know  
When I am gone.

Grant that the dawn may come,  
Soft as a sigh.  
Wrapped in her rose and gold,  
So let me die.

## MY LOVE SHALL BE FOREVER STILLED

When God has found a game to please Him more,  
And reaches out across the starry way  
To gather in the marbles that He spilled  
Across Infinity — that day the door  
Shall softly close between us, friend. That day  
My love for you shall be forever stilled.

## REQUEST

Show him the broken lily  
You put above my head;  
Tell him that words are silly,  
But I am dead.

See if his lips will quiver,  
See if his lashes fall;  
Point to the quiet river —  
Invite him to call.

## BLACK RIVER

Flood time, Black River! Moan like a lover gone mad.  
Throw back your head, bare your teeth to Heaven,  
and roar until brave men tremble. Leap from your  
banks, mad with the spirit of plunder.  
Rush, floor of the valley! Swirl, low-lying hamlets!  
Fly, laggards' heels!  
Here is a home just deserted. Trample your way through  
the door. Fondle the glistening stove with a roast  
of beef in its oven. Throttle the coals in their bed.  
Strip from the walls every hanging. Sweep like a  
broom of the gods. . .

(But who can tell of Black River? What lies in its  
surging heart? To the top of a gilded cage it softly,  
tenderly creeps, to bring eternal freedom to a tiny  
yellow bird.)

## WARRIOR WITH A DRUM

By MACKINLAY KANTOR

Early in the winter he is beating,  
When the hands of leaves are thin  
And fallen — when the frozen mist  
Steals out to rape the glowing moon.

These are the legends he drums:

“In the wet marsh behind the mountain  
I scattered golden waterfowl  
As I came singing through the reeds.  
. . . Bruise and break the tender fodder,  
For the birds are risen and are gone.”

Beating and thumping —  
Wound in a rich blue blanket  
With stars in his hair,  
And berries in his mouth,  
And shells a-hanging from his shoulders. . . .

There were wild, black cattle on the ridges:

“Oho — I sing to you by your fires —  
There were wild black cattle!  
. . . But I drove them before me  
With the song of my hands.

“Light the embers left from evening,  
Mash the horses’ brains for tanning;  
Paint my name in blood upon the lodges. . . .”

In the damp wind  
From the valley of the Sauks,  
He rides and yammers and drums.

## BRIEF REVIEW

*The Creative Spirit: An Inquiry Into American Life*, by ROLLO WALTER BROWN. (Harper, \$2.50.) I was inclined at first to be a little disappointed in this book. Knowing as I do something of the work Mr. Brown has done, as teacher and lecturer, for artists in America, I found him a little too facile in categories and formulas—a little too much bemused by *words*, and too much inclined to put his trust in them; and I was reminded once again of Huneker's quotation from Flaubert: "What fools these college professors are when they talk about art!" But as I read on, Mr. Brown's earnestness, honesty, and good sense won me over. His chapter on the church, which seemed particularly unpromising, is one of the best in the book. As a whole, I feel that this book is abundantly worth reading and thinking over; and I believe that it will have a definite usefulness. J. T. F.

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

MILDRED FOWLER FIELD is one of a literary group in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She has been spending the winter in Florida.

MACKINLAY KANTOR, a newspaper man of Webster City, Iowa, has published poems in a number of periodicals, notably in the *Overland*. THE MIDLAND printed four poems by him in its November, 1924, number.

CHARLES BROWN NELSON, whose home is in Audubon, Iowa, is a student at the University of Iowa. He is the author of poems printed in *All's Well* and *Brief Stories*.

EDWIN FORD PIPER, an associate editor of THE MIDLAND, is well known to its readers. His *Barbed Wire and Wayfarers*, published a year ago by the Macmillan Company, attracted wide attention.

